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SUBJECT: HERAT: KARZAI SEEKS FEMALE VOTES, BUT CANDIDATES FACE  
CHALLENGES

REF: Kabul 1662

¶1. (U) President Karzai has moved to develop a strong basis of support among female voters in Herat. On June 22 he opened an electoral campaign center for women there, a sign of anticipation that he will need women's votes on election day. Like his campaign office (reftel), the women's center is serving lunch and other refreshments daily. Karzai's female outreach strategy appears to be working, and further adds to the general view that Karzai has co-opted the key ethnic and minority groups to support his campaign.

¶2. (U) Female candidates, on the other hand, continue to struggle, particularly with obtaining financial support for their campaigns and security. According to UNAMA's human rights office, female candidates are unable to access some districts for security reasons, and must campaign in these districts through family members and associates. One female candidate was forced to withdraw from the PC campaign prior to the finalization of the final PC candidate list after she received threats against her person and her daughters. She told UNAMA that she was too fearful to report the threats to the National Directorate of Security (NDS).

¶3. (U) On a positive note, as a result of the June 17 roundtable discussion with Herat's Provincial Council involving Ambassador Eikenberry and Minister Atmar, female PC Member Shahnaz Ghowsi reported that security for female PC members had been restored at Minister Atmar's direction. (Note: Originally, the MOI withdrew security for female incumbents seeking reelection, reasoning that providing such security would favor their current campaigns for a new term. End Note.) The U.S.-funded National Democratic Institute (NDI) will provide training to female candidates from all provinces in Kabul starting July 24, and candidates from Herat are expected to attend. Additionally the International Republican Institute (IRI) said it is working with women's groups.

EIKENBERRY